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WE SHALL REMAIN
Community and Library Outreach
Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WE SHALL REMAIN, produced by WGBH for its *American Experience* series, is a multimedia project aimed at establishing Native American history as an essential part of American history. The project's centerpiece is a five-part television documentary series that aired on public TV stations in April and May of 2009.

WGBH created a national outreach initiative around WE SHALL REMAIN. First, community coalitions were convened by 15 public TV stations that received financial and technical support from WGBH to partner with local community organizations to create materials and events that make local connections to the national series.¹ The second component of the outreach initiative was a library event kit developed in partnership with the American Library Association with ideas and resources to help libraries organize events related to the series. This evaluation describes how the community coalition and library outreach activities unfolded and assesses their reach and impact on participants.

METHODS

The evaluation activities consisted of:

- An online survey of coalition members, which assessed coalition functioning, materials and events created, and outcomes for coalition members, their organizations, and their communities (at least two members of every coalition gave input; overall, 88 out of 166 members completed it, for a response rate of 53%).
- Phone interviews with five selected public TV station representatives, which gathered more contextual data on coalition functioning, materials and events, future plans, and suggestions for improvement.
- An interactive online discussion board for public TV station representatives designed to have them discuss coalition successes and challenges, outcomes and impact, and future plans; six participated.
- A paper survey for audiences at selected high-profile community-wide events, designed to assess event impact on the public; 11 coalitions provided data, mostly from WSR screenings, for a total of 521 responses.
- An online library event kit survey to determine whether and how librarians used the kit; the response rate was 13% (N=270) of the 2,126 randomly selected public libraries, which is in the expected range for surveys of this nature with participants who are not personally invested in the topic.

KEY FINDINGS

Community Coalitions

The community coalition component of the WE SHALL REMAIN outreach initiative was very successful, especially in terms of building relationships

¹ Two coalitions did not participate in any evaluation activities, so are not described in the report.

among coalition members and leaving a lasting impact on the local communities in which they operated.

The coalitions created diverse materials and events that included screenings; lectures and discussions; museum, history, and art exhibits; arts activities, including concerts, dance performances, and writing workshops; storytelling events; and educational curricula. Screenings were the most common events. WGBH staff assistance and WGBH-provided resources were rated as quite helpful, particularly the video clips, web assets, and preview. Respondents appreciated how far in advance they received most materials, but would have liked certain materials sooner and a clearer sense of reporting requirements.

Public TV station representatives noted the importance of shared goals in sustaining their coalitions. Engaging Native American communities was a common challenge; successful approaches included sensitivity to local context and customs and good relationships with Native American partners who served as guides and liaisons. Another challenge was staff turnover. Despite the challenges, most respondents were enthusiastic about their involvement and felt their coalitions had met their goals and objectives.

Coalition members represented a broad range of organizations, including local Native and tribal organizations, libraries, colleges, state parks, archaeological surveys, radio stations, museums, history centers, arts organizations, and more. Some respondents called for more Native involvement in creating the WE SHALL REMAIN materials and events, particularly the local productions. The events drew well from both Native and non-Native communities.

Coalition members — both Natives and non-Natives — reported benefits to themselves and their organizations, particularly in strengthening and building relationships. These relationships led to an enduring legacy in the form of planned future collaborations around WE SHALL REMAIN as well as other projects. Native coalition members were less likely than their non-Native counterparts to say their organizations had benefited.

The community-wide events appeared to have a fairly dramatic impact on audience members, who believed that it was very important for people to learn about Native American history and culture and who reported learning a great deal of new information from the events. Coalition members also rated the events as quite successful in terms of engaging and affecting the audience.

Library Event Kits

The WE SHALL REMAIN library event kit was a valuable resource whose potential could ideally have been more fully realized. About half of respondents had shared the library event kit with colleagues, and about half had used or planned to use the kit. The rest either did not plan to use it, primarily due to staffing constraints and competing priorities, or did not recall receiving it. The poster and bookmarks were especially likely to be used and were highly rated. Just under half of kit users had used website resources; the most popular were the reading lists. One-third of kit users had conducted activities; again, staffing constraints were the main reason for not doing so.

Librarians who had used or planned to use the kit reacted positively to it; they were enthusiastic about its design, content, ease of use, and appeal to patrons. They rated it as very successful in building interest in and extending the impact of the broadcast and promoting understanding of Native American culture and history. Not surprisingly, the kit and the series itself drew more interest in communities with larger Native American populations. However, because the response rate to the library event kit survey was low (13%), it is unclear whether these findings would generalize to the broader population of librarians receiving the kit.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Future similar projects are most likely to be successful when, as with the WE SHALL REMAIN initiative, project goals are shared by a variety of potential partners in the local community, allowing for synergy and win-win collaborations among partners. Leaving a lasting legacy, as was done by the WE SHALL REMAIN outreach initiative, is possible when there are enhanced relationships and plans for future collaborative projects.

Coalition members were very appreciative of WGBH assistance and resources. Areas for improvement are making reporting expectations clearer at the beginning of the project and providing certain materials (e.g., screeners, teacher's guide) in a timelier fashion.

WGBH also received high marks for detailed and complete advance planning that helped mitigate the impact of unexpected turnover at the stations. WGBH might offer as a tip to future coalition members the importance of such groundwork and suggest designating a backup project leader.

The most successful strategies for engaging the local Native American community in the WE SHALL REMAIN project involved sensitivity to and awareness of the local context and customs as well as good relationships with people or groups in the Native community who could act as liaisons or guides. Similar strategies are also likely to be successful in future projects of this nature.

Targeting the distribution of event kits to librarians who have already indicated interest, perhaps by returning a postcard or replying to an e-mailed invitation, would likely result in better utilization rates. Further, resources could be targeted at publicizing the availability of the library event kit online instead of printing and mailing unsolicited hard-copy library kits. One exception in which hard copies worked well was the bookmarks and posters, which were much appreciated and widely used by the librarians.